

OPINION LEADERSHIP AMONG FARM WOMEN IN HILL DISTRICTS OF UTTARAKHAND STATE, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The rural agrarian economy of Uttarakhand rests on the shoulders of the women especially rural women in the hill district of the state. The development of the hill regions of Uttarakhand is dependent on both technology generation and technology dissemination as per the needs of the target groups i. e. farm women in the farming system (Mettric, 1993). For effective dissemination of information and technology, the combined effort of extension personnel along with the opinion leaders is a critical component of any developmental strategy. The present investigation aims to identify opinion leaders among farm women in hill districts of Uttarakhand, who may not only enhance the pace of development by ensuring effective extension but can also play a significant role to promote development initiatives at various levels especially in agriculture and allied sectors. Besides, the present study analyzes the extent to which opinion leadership is exhibited by these opinion leaders in the study area. Total 24 farm women were identified as opinion leaders with high in-degree centrality scores and occupying the central positions in the communication network. While, the maximum percentage of the opinion leaders (58.34%) showed low opinion leadership followed by 25 per cent and 16.66 percent of opinion leaders who had high and low opinion leadership respectively.

KEYWORDS: Opinion Leaders, Farm Women, Communication Network, Network Centrality & Opinion Leadership

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INTRODUCTION

The fact that Uttarakhand most effective and leading workforce is of women is visible in every walk of life, from agriculture to small industry. But due to certain specificities like inaccessibility, fragility, marginality, diversity or heterogeneity, as described by **Jodha (1992)**, life, in general, is tougher for Himalayan women. As reported by **Yadav (2008)** women in hills are more dependent on interpersonal channels of communication than mass media and other cosmopolite channels. This relationship of dependency existing among women farmers in a village system has resulted in the establishment of patterned flow of communication or communication network (interconnected individuals linked by patterned flows of communication).

However, within this communication structure, there exist few individuals known as ‘opinion leaders’ whose opinions are sought by women farmers and who exerts an influence over the decision making of the women farmers on varied aspects of agriculture and allied activities. As stated by **Merwe and Heerden, (2009)** the

identification of opinion leaders can be simplified through the use of network theory. These networks can be used to construct relational networks, and the individual who is central to these networks can be considered to be the opinion leaders in a specific network. However, there exists a significant difference of opinion leadership even among these opinion leaders. It is based on the assumption that not all opinion leaders were sought on equal extent from other fellow farm women. Hence, opinion leadership in the present study is operationalized as the ability of the opinion leaders to influence other fellow farm women and was determined by how many people consult an individual (farm woman) for advice on an agricultural subject in the study villages. Thus, the main focus of the study is to identify opinion leaders among farm women using communication network analysis. Further, in the present study, for a clear insight, an attempt has been made to determine the extent to which opinion leadership was exhibited by the identified opinion leaders in the study area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was conducted in hill districts of Uttarakhand state during the year 2017-2018. A total of 298 farm women as respondents i. e. 177 respondents from village *Badiyakot* and 121 respondents from village *SabliTalli* were surveyed for sociometric responses. The descriptive research design was used for conducting the research study. Primary data from semi-structured interview schedule and non-participant observation were used for collecting the information. UCINET 6 software package (Borgatti, S. P., Everett, M. G. and Freeman, L. C. 2002) has been used to calculate the network centrality (in-degree centrality score) of farm women within the delineated communication networks of the respective villages. In-degree centrality scores of all the respondents in the two villages were calculated separately and based on mean and standard deviation; respondents were categorized under low, medium and high category respectively. Opinion leaders were identified as those farm women who belonged to the high category of in-degree centrality and hence, occupy a central position in the graphical representation of the communication network of farm women in the two villages namely village *SabliTalli* and village *Badiyakot*. For the purpose of measurement of opinion leadership of opinion leaders, total sociometric score i. e. in-degree scores (total nominations) was obtained for the identified opinion leaders on the basis of a number of choices from fellow farm women in the village on a sociometric test related to agriculture. Based on the total in-degree centrality scores (the total nominations/sociometric scores) obtained by each opinion leader, the opinion leadership of identified opinion leaders was categorized into high, medium and low opinion leadership by using maximum score (47) minus minimum score (14) divided by three.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the present study, opinion leaders were identified as those individuals (farm women) to/from whom other fellow farm woman approaches/seek opinions, advice or consultancy on agriculture-related issues/matters. The identified opinion leaders act as an influencer and are able to influence others' decisions and actions on agriculture-related issues. To identify opinion leaders, most empirical network studies have focused on finding individuals who have higher in-degree values because it is more likely that lay people seek advice from individuals who have higher in-degree value and, therefore, these individuals could affect other people's decision making.

Opinion leaders, thus, in the present study are those to whom the maximum number of farm women reaches for advice/consultancy, which was measured using in-degree centrality scores of farm women in the respective networks. Based on the in-degree centrality scores of the respondents in the village *Badiyakot*, twelve farm women were identified as

opinion leaders on the account of their high in-degree centrality scores. Similarly, with respect to the village *SabliTalli*, even number of farm women i. e. twelve were identified as opinion leaders based on their high in-degree centrality scores respectively.

Table 1: Network Centrality (In-degree Centrality Scores) of Identified Opinion Leaders

| Village SabliTalli | | | Village Badiyakot | | |
|--------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| Sl. No. | Respondent No. | In-degree Centrality Scores | Sl. No. | Respondent No. | In-degree Centrality Scores |
| 1 | 48 | 29 | 1 | 58 | 47 |
| 2 | 61 | 21 | 2 | 162 | 44 |
| 3 | 108 | 21 | 3 | 129 | 44 |
| 4 | 34 | 19 | 4 | 35 | 43 |
| 5 | 24 | 19 | 5 | 24 | 40 |
| 6 | 68 | 17 | 6 | 146 | 38 |
| 7 | 35 | 17 | 7 | 103 | 33 |
| 8 | 13 | 16 | 8 | 5 | 32 |
| 9 | 19 | 16 | 9 | 71 | 27 |
| 10 | 80 | 15 | 10 | 108 | 17 |
| 11 | 113 | 14 | 11 | 16 | 17 |
| 12 | 90 | 14 | 12 | 119 | 15 |

Table 1 presents the in-degree centrality scores of the farm women who scored highest and thus, qualifies as opinion leaders in each village under study. Opinion leaders occupying a central position in the graphical representation of the communication network of farm women in the two villages namely village *SabliTalli* and village *Badiyakot* has also been presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2 respectively..

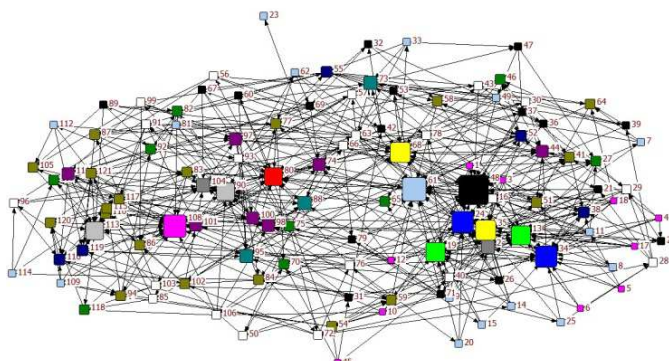


Figure 1: Network Graph (Communication Network) of Farm Women in Village SabliTalli on the basis of their in-Degree Centrality Scores (Total Respondents=121)

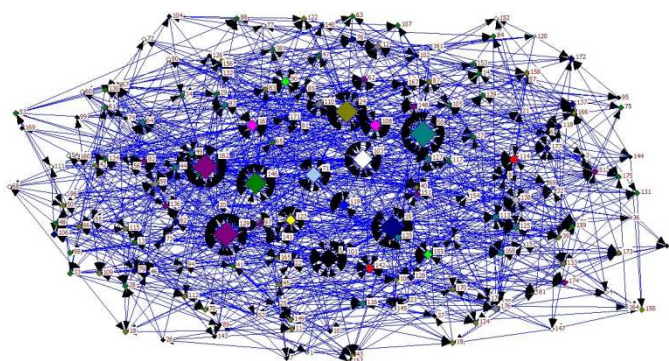


Figure 2: Network Graph (Communication Network) of Farm Women in Village Badiyakot on the Basis of their in-Degree Centrality Scores (Total Respondents =177)

Further, the present investigation operationalizes opinion leadership as the ability of the opinion leaders to influence other fellow farm women in the study villages. It was assumed that the number of people who nominate an individual reflects the amount of influence she has on them. Also, the more nominations one has from other, the higher in-degree one has. This means that the lower the number of nominations, the weaker the extent of opinion leadership, while the higher the number of nominations, the stronger the extent of opinion leadership.

Based on the total in-degree centrality scores (the total nominations/sociometric scores) obtained by each opinion leader, the opinion leadership of identified opinion leaders was categorized into high, medium and low opinion leadership by using maximum score (47) minus minimum score (14) divided by three. The data presented in Table 2 shows the distribution of the opinion leaders according to their extent of opinion leadership in agriculture. The analysis of the data indicates that maximum percentage of the opinion leaders (58.34%) had low opinion leadership (14 to 25) followed by 25 per cent of opinion leaders who had high opinion leadership (36 to 47) respectively. The remaining 16.66 per cent of the opinion leaders had a medium level of extent of opinion leadership (25 to 36).

Table 2: Distribution of Opinion Leaders according to their Extent of Opinion Leadership

| Sl. No | Extent of Opinion Leadership (in-Degree Centrality Scores) | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|--|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Low opinion leadership (14 to 25) | 14 | 58.34 |
| 2 | Medium opinion leadership (25 to 36) | 4 | 16.66 |
| 3 | High opinion leadership (36 to 47) | 6 | 25.00 |

Maximum=47, Minimum=14

According to these findings, high opinion leadership was exhibited by 25 per cent of the opinion leaders and thus, qualify as strong opinion leaders with significant potential influence. The probable reason might be due to the fact that most of these opinion leaders were either more socially active in terms of social participation, cosmo politeness, mass-media exposure, etc. and had maximum years of farming experience. Despite these, the relatively large percentage of opinion leaders about 58.34 per cent indicates low opinion leadership. This further, implies that many of the influence relationships are within either friendship or relatives circles/cliques and that these could perhaps be used to effectively mobilize the influence of opinion leaders.

A cursory look at the findings indicates that among all the twenty-four opinion leaders, the strong opinion leaders were significantly less namely six opinion leaders, which suggests that opinion leaders differ according to degrees of influence they exert. Further, implies that these were most influentials and were consulted for advice on agricultural issues by the maximum number of fellow farm women in the study area.

CONCLUSIONS

Although total twelve farm women were identified as opinion leaders in the two villages under study namely village *Badiyakot* and village *SabliTalli* respectively, there exists a significant difference of opinion leadership even among these opinion leaders. It is based on the assumption that not all opinion leaders were sought on equal extent from other fellow farm women in the two villages. From the above findings, it may be stated that the extent of opinion leadership among opinion leaders varies from leaders to leaders, and is influenced by many factors, in the present study by age, education, farming experience, trustworthiness, market exposure, knowledge, training exposure, active participation in social organizations, and so on. Therefore, rather than delimiting the outcomes of the present investigation to identification of opinion leaders and determination of their extent of opinion leadership, it become more imperative to draw the possible

reasons behind the selection of these opinion leaders and hence provides a way for others to effectively select and involve these few prominent individuals in successful planning and implementation of any developmental programmes and strategies.

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